

THE
COMMONWEAL

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE
NEW ZEALAND FEDERATION OF SOCIALIST SOCIETIES
SPECIAL EDITION: WHAT IS TO BE DONE?



Introduction

MARTIN CRICK

The left is in disarray worldwide, indeed it is in retreat in the face of a resurgent populist right and far right. Donald Trump is tearing to shreds the post-World War II international consensus, flawed though it is and was, and we seem to be heading back to the 19th century of ‘great power’ imperialism. Is capitalism itself in crisis? Social-democratic parties, whom one might reasonably have termed centre left even 10 years ago, have decided that the way to respond to the right is to steal some of their clothes, particularly on immigration. All previous evidence suggests that this will fail to attract voters back into the fold. In New Zealand the Labour Party remains in thrall to neo-liberal economic policies and can only react to Coalition policies whilst offering none of its own to address the concerns of voters, whether on health, education, housing, or the cost of living. It offers no vision of what a socialist future might

look like. The trade unions remain emasculated, although the CTU is showing some signs of life. The left here is minuscule, a number of tiny sects and groups, almost invisible to the average Kiwi. *What is to be done?* was the question some of us in the Federation of Socialist Societies have been asking, echoing Lenin’s question of 1901, the subtitle of his pamphlet being ‘Burning Questions of Our Movement’. So, we asked all the left-wing groups in New Zealand, that we were aware of, to respond. Some didn’t, some said they were unable to do so at this moment in time, but in this special online edition of *Commonweal* we have compiled the contributions of those groups that did. Apart from minor editing for style I have left them exactly as they came in, and I present them without comment. I hope that this might be the beginning of a conversation that will take us much further down the track towards answering the question.

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The New Zealand Federation of Socialist Societies

TOM ROUD

The Federation of Socialist Societies is composed of three regional affiliates based in Canterbury, Wellington, and Otago. Presented in order of their appearance as organised bodies, the three groups have some particularities but are united on a broadly shared principle of socialism combined with a common ethos—a clear *raison d'être*.

One of the earliest organisational documents, besides a pragmatic constitution outlining the structure of the Society, was a text called *Conversation, Correspondence, Camaraderie*. The short text provided a brief reminiscence on the Canterbury affiliate's foundation and included the short quote 'that the number of our members shall be unlimited'. This, from the rules of the London Corresponding Society in 1792, was combined with a general agreement on a broad conception of socialism expressed thus: *'We take socialism to mean the political goal of bringing the working class to power at all levels of society in order to establish a system where production is organised rationally to meet human need, rather than for the accumulation of private wealth'*, and was developed into a foundational principle of the Federation through practice and experience. Simply put, that membership to the Society be very broad and based on agreement with some basic principles (as was the case with the London Corresponding Society almost 250 years earlier), joint with that most fundamental aspect of any membership organisation—a membership fee. The fee itself has always been nominal, more symbolic than it is a fee for service. Nonetheless these two features are, in fact, a key aspect of any

organisation (political or otherwise) for ordinary people dating back to the LCS declaring their membership as being, hypothetically, 'unlimited.'

Leaping forward in time a little, a proposition from English communist and artisan William Morris helped guide a significant part of what it was we should *do* in the current period: *'Our immediate aim should be chiefly educational... with a view to dealing with the crisis if it should come in our day, or of handing on the tradition of our hope to others if we should die before it comes.'* This passage from 1884 spoke to the experience of many early members, some of whom had many decades experience in socialist organisations—while others were coming in new to the whole endeavour.

With these two key aspects of the Federation in mind, the title *'Conversation, Correspondence, Camaraderie'* is fairly well served. With regular educational events, free to access for the public and in venues that have a convivial atmosphere, alongside a network of communication and discussion avenues for members and supporters it is clear that two thirds of that title have been achieved. We are close to the publication of the seventh issue of *The Commonweal*, a membership written newsletter on all topics of interest to socialists—yet again, conversation and correspondence, and the chiefly educational role is well represented. But what of camaraderie?

It's perhaps a tedious cliché at this late hour to note that the socialist left can behave in potentially anti-social ways. This is not unusual for groups of people drawn together by ideological commitment on the one hand, and relative

marginality on the other. It is, indeed, deeply *frustrating* to be a socialist today. That this unease, frustration, perhaps *alienation*, manifests itself in the ‘circular firing squad’ left—recriminations, purity tests, splits and slander, is of no great surprise.

The fractious tendencies described should not be read as personal failings of individual socialists. Instead, we should consider that we are, like all those before us, living in conditions where the ‘traditions of all dead generations weigh like a nightmare on the brains of the living.’ The confessional sect, forever purifying itself by finding those not dedicated enough, has been dominant in the anglophone socialist left for decades.

To achieve the, ironically, elusive goal of *camaraderie* is not about attitude. Rather, it takes some meaningful change in what is meant to be united in common cause. For the Federation this follows two streams.

The first is having a *limited* purpose. The Federation is, by some factor, larger than any other explicitly socialist organisation in the country—yet it does not claim to be *The Party*, or pre-party. In fact, being the largest group is more of a symptom of socialist marginalisation than a great indicator of extraordinary success—our membership may be hypothetically unlimited, but the socialist left does need actual membership organisations in the tens (if not hundreds) of thousands nationally. The affiliates have been, thus far, reluctant to even explicitly direct members to pursue specific activities with a particular ‘line’. We are united for our purposes, which are mentioned above, and are more specifically about regular educational and social events for like-minded people. When it comes to activity, members are expected and encouraged to do such things as they believe are the best use of their own time. From the variety

of experiences and lessons members accumulate we then seek to share this knowledge—through the very conversation, correspondence, and camaraderie mentioned at the start of this piece. Our members aim to be part of the fabric of everyday life—not an alien and unfamiliar influence tucked away in hidden sanctums.

The second is having what could be called a ‘good enough’ attitude to political unity. Members join the Federation indicating they agree with our general purpose and our broad understanding of the project of socialism. It is taken on trust that members have agreed to join and as such will understand the necessity of differences of opinion in the society—and perhaps more to the point, differences of priority. It is taken as read, though occasionally it needs to be articulated explicitly, that we are in fact on the same side—he waka eke noa—paddling in the same general direction.

From half a dozen friends in 2017, to a functional national organisation in 2025. We have hosted two national conferences—the first in Canterbury and the second in Wellington. With some years behind us the affiliates are now getting into their stride. It is, for now, only a start. The road ahead will take extraordinary patience, and it may become necessary to pivot in ways that intervene in high politics—articulating a perspective for the working class coming to power, as well as the slow process of building a party. For this latter project, it might take looking back to our forebears who sought to win some representation in territorial authorities rather than rushing straight for parliament etc. Nonetheless the Federation feels in good stead today, as we try to live up to an axiom of the early days of the Wellington affiliate that has served them well—don’t be a dick.

International Bolshevik Tendency

Fighting for revolutionary party and program in New Zealand

This piece addresses a very select audience—comrades who see the need for *communist revolution* and wish to discuss the tasks of communists within the present New Zealand left.

Spontaneity & the Party

Recent years have seen a striking increase in protest in this country. In the last six years, rallies for Palestine, trans rights, the School Strike for Climate, Hikoī mō te Tiriti and the camp at Ihumātao have drawn the largest numbers ever recorded for their respective causes. All but the most stolid sectarians realise that communists should be working within them, but often leftist support comes with illusions in the significance, scope and content of existing movements.

Most of us understand that social progress under capitalism is partial, temporary or illusory. For every movement for rights and dignity that achieves significant gains, there are others that merely incorporate new minorities into the bourgeois apparatus, or are simply too far beyond the pale of capitalist profitability or morality to have a chance. Even substantial gains can be reversed once crowds disperse and circumstances change, as demonstrated by the present worldwide roll-back of rights to abortion, hormones, and protest.

And yet, most of the left engage with social movements. Why? Some believe they inherently strengthen class struggle, fostering a spirit of generalised resistance. There is an illusion that a convergence of movements could become the revolution itself and that communists should move into struggles like stormwater into a river, swelling its banks until it overflows into adjacent waters. One big torrent—the movement of movements—would carry us to revolution, with communists merely contributing numbers, organisation, or minor course corrections.

It's true that this perspective has helped groups like the International Socialist Organisation move from isolation to a regular supporting force at rallies. It's also true that such movements permit communists a chance to interact with advanced elements of the working class. But capitalism is readily capable of absorbing sectoral movements even far larger and more radical than we have today. They plainly *don't* contain an inherent content of class struggle, let alone revolution.

Revolutionary politics isn't native to social movements. It has to be *injected into them* to achieve genuinely irreversible liberation. Spontaneists reject this because it undermines a strategy of merging into social movements to gently guide them towards their inherent but unrealised potential. Communists seek to *change* the consciousness of other activists, winning people to ideas which are not natural to the course of their struggle, and likely butting heads with organic leaders.

The International Bolshevik Tendency often participates in sectoral movements, most recently in trans and student struggles. We seek not only to join but to form militant poles

within movements, posing a class perspective that opposes subordination of the struggle to liberal mis-leadership, and introduces transitional demands to raise the level of action and consciousness toward revolution.

Some tell us this is out of place. Rally-goers do not expect to be told how trans or student struggles need to be tied to militant trade unionism and the expropriation of the capitalist class, or how liberation short of socialist revolution is illusory. But this kind of intervention gains a hearing for the communist program and through it we have experienced modest growth.

At a time when workers don't have a party able to provide an alternative to single-issue movements, the job of revolutionaries is to work towards building that party, a cohesive revolutionary leadership. This requires clarification of the tasks ahead through competition with groups and programs that merely propose fixes to capitalism, and through argument about how to transcend the immediate issues and move toward revolution. Sectoral movements can't uproot the oppression that creates them, but to convince their best fighters of this requires us to join in their struggles—without compromising revolutionary politics.

Trade Unions & Class Struggle

Unlike street protest, trade unionism has not risen to meet the rightward shift in politics. The 2018–19 strike wave ended with Covid, and militancy has been slow to return. Unions, already weakened by decades of mis-leadership and ebbing struggle, have largely failed to resist anti-worker politics, mostly limiting themselves to endorsing Labour at election time. Yet they remain a crucial instrument of working-class defence and potential mass political struggle. With the exception of the sectarian Socialist Equality Group the New Zealand left agrees on this, but confuses supporting the unions as they are with fighting for what they must become.

The reasons can sound compelling. In a period of reduced class struggle the union bureaucracy is generally to the left of the disengaged

rank-and-file. Ask an organiser why they didn't drive a harder bargain, encourage a strike, or advocate a politics left of Labour, and the answer is usually 'I'd love to, but I can't without more members.' The left generally accepts that the current task is building back the dismal capacity of the unions by acting as an adjunct to the present leadership. But isn't this the mantra of every Labour politician? Every reformist thrust into a position of responsibility? 'I'd love to, but the support—the votes—the power, isn't there.' Is it always cold necessity that the real fight starts tomorrow? Or have we mistaken cause and effect?

Union membership hasn't returned precisely because the unions have failed to fight, even in limited ways, when workers needed it. Workers have learnt to expect little from the unions, and engage with them accordingly. Simply increasing membership won't achieve leftist aims without a struggle to re-politicise unions—something most leaders actively resist.

Unlike sectoral movements, class struggle is native to the unions, but it is so deformed by mis-leadership that the tasks for communists are largely the same: to struggle for a militant pole, for open discussion of strategic differences, and to challenge the leadership. Day-to-day struggle over wages, hours and conditions must be connected to the need for industrial action across sectors or even national borders, the use of workers' industrial power to intervene in ongoing struggles, such as against the oppression of Māori or trans people, and the question of workers' state power itself.

In particular, this will necessitate a struggle against anti-strike laws, an issue that union leaderships have tossed in the 'too hard' basket, and with it much of the hope for a renewed working-class politics in this country.

The big tent

Leftists are painfully conscious of the 'Life of Brian' caricature of the revolutionary movement as a mess of petty sectarian squabbles, and many respond by seeking to unify 'all communists', 'all who want revolution' or 'everyone left of the Greens'. This big tent approach has shaped groups

like Organise Aotearoa, System Change Aotearoa, and Te Nuku Mauī. But no such group actually becomes the pole of regroupment it envisions, leaving many ‘broad churches’, each refusing to discuss or clarify their differences. The NZ left is united in its (non-revolutionary) politics and disunited in its practical work—we need the opposite: unity in campaigns to defend the basic interests of the working class and the oppressed, while at the same time conducting hard debate for the clarification of the revolutionary program.

A revolutionary group must do more than preaching revolution in the abstract, while only uniting in action around easy low-level demands. The crucial question is how to get from the minimum program, from today’s struggles, to the ever-distant maximum program of socialist revolution. It may be possible to temporarily paper over differences on that vital part of the program that lies between the minimum and the maximum, but in the end this is the way that group after group falls apart, or falls into irrelevance.

Unity between revolutionaries is important, but unity can only be achieved around the *necessary basis* for unity. Fusions are only desirable if they bring revolutionaries together and advance their strength and capacity. Conversely, splits are *no bad thing* when they succeed in separating revolutionaries from reformists, sectarians and other non-revolutionaries.

So, what is to be done?

There is no shortcut to success. Revolutionary communists in this country are few, and this number won’t be grown by pithy populism. The task of this moment is propaganda—appealing to the concerns of the section of the masses that are at this time open to communist ideas—and to consistently work to bring definition to the revolutionary program through processes of debate, education, struggle and engagement with the left and the broader world as a whole. Aotearoa New Zealand can be a sleepy country that has produced a left with humble ambitions. Communism means having the courage to demand the world.



International Socialist Organisation of Aotearoa New Zealand

ROHAN BOTICA
AND BRANDON JOHNSTONE

The Case For Organisation

While there is never a bad time to articulate the need for the organisation of our side, the international working class, it is especially important that we do this now, as both left-wing and right-wing movements grow. We showcase our way of organising both through our writing and through real-world application. The below piece was initially published in The Socialist, the flagship paper of the International Socialist Organisation of Aotearoa, and puts forth a conceptualisation of organising that is neither tyrannical nor structureless.

Now

It is more popular and socially acceptable than it has been in many decades to describe yourself as an anti-capitalist. It is not hard to see why. As the crises pile up—from climate disasters, to unmitigated pandemics, to live-streamed genocides—people come to agree that the capitalist system of production, which ties all of these crises together and places profit over human need, must fall. But

even as anti-capitalist sentiment sees a resurgence, anti-capitalist *power* grows much more slowly.

Them

On the other side, the ruling capitalist class is as powerful and all-encompassing as ever. They are robustly organised: through their multinational corporations, international trade alliances, exclusive clubs, and lobby organisations; through their military and police forces that establish a monopoly on violence; through media, think-tanks, and academic institutions that ensure that their ideas remain the dominant ideology of society.

While individual capitalists can compete or disagree over how best to exploit the working class and maintain the steady flow of profit, they understand and agree upon their class interests and collaborate to protect those interests from threats.

A system this strong cannot be meaningfully confronted by individuals with good ideas. So, what will it take to bring this system down?

Power

When lone workers confront the capitalists' authority, they discover their relative powerlessness against institutions and systems. But when workers pool their power and threaten to withhold their labour to shut production down, they can even the playing field with the bosses. The

system simply cannot function without the working class, whose labour generates the excess value that the capitalist takes as profit. This critical position is where workers realise their collective power within the capitalist system.

Though unions bargaining for better working conditions are a step forward, they are a defensive tool that fights the effects of capitalism rather than capitalism itself. To achieve a full and final defeat of global capitalism, from which it cannot return, the international working class must go further, grinding the capitalist economy to a halt and seizing its productive forces for democratic redirection toward human need. For this, the working class will need consciousness, political clarity, and will, which can only develop through struggle.

Reformist political parties, NGOs and most trade unions, though often well-meaning, do not have this revolutionary end in mind and can act to bolster capitalism by diverting struggle from this necessary path.

This is where we, as revolutionary socialists, can have an outsized impact. Not as scattered individuals preaching the good word of charitable relations but as a party of radicals whose ideas and politics evolve through active participation in working-class struggle. A party that aims to build these mass movements and push them to become a force strong enough to defeat the capitalist class.

Their side is organised. Ours must be too.

Structure

Neoliberalism's ideological victory and the corresponding lull in left-wing politics have made it difficult for people to conceive of an organisational structure that isn't tyrannical by default. The results have been predictably unfortunate.

Recent inspirational but horizontal uprisings have resulted in worse repression than before, like movements of the Arab Spring, or complete co-option and diffusion, like the Black Lives Matter movement. Without structure and precise strategies they could not sustain themselves toward total victory and against repression or co-option by their ruling class foes. Many

prominent figures within those movements echo this sentiment and lament the possibilities had they been more organised. This of course does not make those movements wrong—any uptick in protest and resistance is a welcome development that needs to be built on.

Similarly, and especially in the West, we see activists tending to coalesce around single-issue campaigns as those issues arise. Horizontal, leaderless organisations are formed with a roar of energy, but members burn out from inefficient decision-making and delegation, and ideological differences cannot be addressed and overcome. The groups dissolve and pop up again to coalesce around the next issue.

Organisation

Thus, this is the case for the revolutionary socialist organisation.

Through democratic centralism every member debates each issue, votes democratically on each issue, and, once a decision is reached, works together to enact that decision. Delegates are voted into specific positions and are immediately recallable by a simple majority.

Yes, the organisation is dedicated to fighting all of capitalism's organs and oppressions, but without ever losing sight of the head of the beast. The organisation builds momentum through struggle so that we can react more quickly to political developments or even be proactive and take the front foot—to take necessary action and lay out a coherent path forward, and to reject reaction, co-option, or symbolic gestures from the forces of capitalism that seek to divert our energy and resources.

'Without a guiding organisation, the energy of the masses would dissipate like steam not enclosed in a piston-box,' wrote Russian revolutionary Leon Trotsky, 'but nevertheless what moves things is not the piston or the box, but the steam.'

Our Role

In summary: our job as revolutionary socialists is to build a party of politically conscious and

militant workers and students dedicated to the socialist project. We are to serve as the memory of the working class—to learn lessons from history and tools developed by generations of Marxists, to synthesise these learnings for the present moment, and to update them as we advance and develop. We do not dictate to the masses but are comrades in struggle and active participants in today's movements. We influence and are influenced by these movements. We try to move these struggles as far as they can go, spreading the need for a socialist alternative to wider layers of workers, students and the oppressed along the way.

And from here?

In relatively stable times, people's ideas are overwhelmingly the ideas of the ruling class. Today, most people view profit-driven markets, individualism, high rents, long workweeks, international warfare, etc as 'normal' or even 'common sense'. Opposition to capitalism may have entered the public sphere, but its logical solution—revolutionary socialism—remains a fringe political

project. This is the reality that we face and the one that we must work within.

That said, capitalism is a system of crisis, and once these crises reach a tipping point, this ideological dominance can become unstuck. As a new world struggles to be born, workers en masse grasp for alternatives to the status quo. We must be ready to win these masses over to the socialist alternative, for we can be sure that the reformists and fascists will have their arguments ready too. This is why it is crucial that we equip ourselves with those answers in the 'quiet' times while building, practising and stress-testing our ideas and democratic structures.

Join us

There are decades where nothing happens; and there are weeks where decades happen. The work begins now to best prepare for those weeks, if not to help expedite them. If you want to build the socialist alternative, join the International Socialist Organisation of Aotearoa.



Organise Aotearoa

BERNARD MARSH
NATIONAL SECRETARY
ORGANISE AOTEAROA

Slowly attempting to make something new

When Organise Aotearoa launched in 2018 it quickly grew to be one of the largest socialist organisations in the country. This did not last long. Where once we were a national organisation with active members all over the country, now we're limited to Tāmaki Makaurau and are lucky to have more than 10 active members at any given time.

In response to this collapse, we've been embarking on what we're calling the *OA refresh process*. During this process we've done a lot of soul-searching as to how our organisation has ended up in the situation it's in. And the conclusion we've come to is that the problems faced by OA—factionalism, directionlessness, burnout—are not unique to OA but are the results of wider material conditions and that the attempt to solve them is one and the same with figuring out how to abolish capitalism.

Organisation as the key political question of our time

When Leftist groups fall apart there is a tendency to blame the personalities involved, the political tendency they follow, or to trot out caricatures of leftists as argumentative or uncommitted to real change. But the fact of the matter is that we are organising in a socio-political environment that continuously structurally reinforces itself. Leftist organisations have problems with racism and

sexism and what not because all organisations in our society do. Leftists have problems getting people to turn up and carry out their responsibilities and get things done because all volunteer groups under capitalism do. Leftists have problems with burnout because everyone has burnout now. And no one has figured out a solution to any of this yet—regardless of whether or not you believe anyone has successfully created a socialist society, it's a matter of fact no one has done it out of a post-industrial liberal democracy.

This is not, however, a call for doomerism, nor a call to completely ignore all that has gone before. Rather it is simply to say that in order to break out of this rut that the entire Aotearoa Left is in, we need to seriously think about the logistics and material realities of how we organise and what we're organising for. And by organising we mean how we act and think and are collectively—in groups, in organisations, in communities. All of this we need to approach with *intentionality*. We can't afford to take anything for granted. We need to be aware of the sorts of interpersonal and organisational habits we've inherited from wider society that might be holding us back—whether obvious things like patriarchal microaggressions or racist assumptions, to less obvious things like an aversion to structured meetings or not thinking about the logistics of decision making. We need to be constantly asking ourselves what the purpose or goal of any activity we engage in is and whether or not we are actually seeing any measurable results.

But what are we actually organising for?

We in Organise Aotearoa are Decolonial Communists. We want to create a world where we have done away with capitalism and colonisation and replaced them with a classless society that is based on tikanga, kaitiakitanga and the principle

of *'from each according to their ability, to each according to their needs'*. We believe this can only be achieved through a revolutionary overthrow and replacement of all our current dominant political and economic structures.

In terms of organising a decolonial communist revolution, our goal is to build into what's called a *dual-power situation*. This is where the organised political and economic institutions of our movement have achieved a level of strength and independence that they can be said to constitute a competing power within society, capable of contesting the power of the political and economic institutions of the capitalist class (ie the market, the state, etc). Dual power represents a temporary situation when the capitalist class's monopoly of power has been disrupted, a situation that will inevitably lead to a clash and thus revolution. However, despite its transitory nature as a precursor to revolution, it is useful to talk of dual power as a goal because of the way in which it frames the act of revolution.

The key goal of organising for a dual power situation is to build an ecosystem of institutions that will eventually be capable of *independently* exerting power. This is very different from, for instance, building a party that aims to capture parliament or building an organisation that aims to influence or transform the state. The key short and medium-term goals in this sort of thinking are to build resilience and self-reliance within our communities and organisations, to build solutions that stay within the people's control. This both protects against later governments simply reversing progress made under their predecessors, and also allows us to prefigure and practice running the sort of society we actually want.

At the time of writing we still have not formulated our actual strategy for how we're going to build dual-power in Aotearoa. However, in our view there are six key sites of struggle. These are:

Constitutional Transformation

The movement to replace the Westminster system with one based on Te Tiriti and He

Whakaputanga is the strongest vehicle for political revolution in this country. Beyond the moral imperative of respecting the right to self-determination of tangata whenua, there's also the simple fact that Te Tiriti, and te ao Māori more broadly, contain the lessons and historical political concepts of an actually existing communist society, albeit one with a very different material base. That said the movement as it currently exists is dominated by moderate, reformist elements who would be happy with a constitutional transformation centred on corporate iwi and a brown-washed version of capitalism. It is imperative that working class and anti-capitalist elements in the movement be strengthened.

Unionism

As communists, it should be no surprise that we support rebuilding the union movement, as it represents the strongest vehicle for self-organisation available for the working class. However, the unions as they currently exist are overly focused on working within the current framework for collective bargaining. They're making important gains for working conditions in specific industries and sectors but also leaving behind smaller worksites and more precarious workers and utterly failing to build up any sort of culture of class consciousness or collective action in the industries they are active in. Broadening the movement to be more member-led and more inclusive of a wider range of industries—perhaps even including those sections of the working class currently left behind, like the unemployed—would be key for building up worker self-organisation and moving it beyond reformism.

Justice

The New Zealand justice system is the frontline of both colonisation and the class war. Organising in this space is necessary to both protect working—class Māori and racialised communities from being further traumatised and disrupted by the state as well as to give the working class an opportunity to develop our own solutions

for harm that are transformative and restorative rather than punitive and ineffective.

Housing

The ongoing housing crisis is one of the sharpest class contradictions in Aotearoa. Through organising tenants and renters unions, as well as investigating non-traditional forms of accessing and managing housing (such as squatting or land trusts), a revolutionary movement might not just provide some relief for one of the most pressing concerns for many working class kiwis but also bring into their control one of the most important aspects of any society. Through building ties with hapu, working in the housing space can also provide a powerful onramp for moving this country towards Land Back.

Internationalism

It goes without saying that our society exists in a global system. International solidarity is not just a moral imperative but also a recognition of this reality. However, moving solidarity work from performative actions (as powerful as that can be) towards something more material, is a crucial necessity for the Left. Within OA we are becoming increasingly focused on solidarity within

Oceania, in particular building ties with the Free West Papua movement. We believe organising in a Pan-Oceanic way could be the future of the Left here as it acknowledges both the reality of Pacific countries and people's intertwined history and existences as well as the necessity of combating ongoing imperialism and colonialism within the region.

Ecology

Ecology is, admittedly, a site of struggle that we haven't thought too deeply about in OA. However, a general understanding of the climate crisis as resulting from a rupture between humanity and papatūānuku resulting from extractive economic practices form a general backdrop to much of our thought.

Conclusion

The revolution is not just going to be a matter of getting the correct ideas. It's also, crucially, going to be a matter of logistics and a matter of how people are organised. At this point in history the key task for the Left is learning how to actually organise ourselves in a way that builds something new.

Platypus Affiliated Society

MICHAEL MCCLELLAND

By Way of Example

I've been invited to write for this special edition of the *Commonweal* concerning 'tactics, strategy, goals, or—in short—*What is to be done?*' I was approached as a representative of the Platypus Affiliated Society, an organisation that is educational in character. Platypus exists to investigate obstacles that foreclose the possibility of a future emancipatory movement. We admit openly that these are not trivial but existential in significance, resulting from the failure of the historical Left. Our starting point is the recognition that no mass working class movement for socialism exists today, and that, consequently, any discussion of building a party in its absence amounts to a moot point.

The most precise way to frame this problem is abstractly: theory and practice are in crisis. The Left, unable to reckon with its history, shows no sign of escaping its cycle of repeating past failures. Given these premises, any attempt to propose 'tactics', 'strategies', or 'goals' is inherently constrained, if not fundamentally paradoxical.

Take the two major catchments of the organisation-building Left—either 'sectarian' and isolated or 'coalitionist' and inclusive—who claim sharp differences in method. Despite their mutual distrust, they appear, from the perspective of socialism's historical high point, as equally irrelevant. To wit, no matter how ambitious or well-intentioned, such groups, in the absence of a class-conscious base, have little choice but to structure themselves around their external limitations. Practically, this means they're forced into either a tactical position—adopting the language

of 'resistance', NGO-ism, and pressure tactics upon the state—or a merely speculative stance that projects today's programme onto tomorrow's movement. As though to make up for the above deficiencies, such groupings may attempt to legitimate themselves via slogans—whether the 'vanguard party', the 'party of the whole class', or others—borrowed from a time when there existed international class consciousness. That is, a time which cannot be compared with the present, only contrasted.

In addition to facing the above obstacles, groups that, conversely, aim to begin humbly and from below—be they anarchists, unionists, community organizers, or good old-fashioned liberals—struggle to build the needed movement up at the base level without facing yet another conundrum. They risk misjudging the depth of the problem, whether this means underestimating the number of ideological obstacles that have accumulated, or overestimating the possibility of there even being such a thing as a 'fresh start'. The dilemma, in short, is that whereas one simply has no way of going out and 'making' the party, so are we all obstructed from 'making' the movement.

This much should not be surprising. Nor does it answer the questions of this edition of the *Commonweal*: In addition to today's 'tactics', 'strategies', and 'goals', I've been asked to reflect on tomorrow—'what is to be done?'—which, by the very question, does not allow 'no' as an answer. 'Well', you might ask, 'if something is to be done, and no-one is capable of doing it, what then?'

I don't know. What appears to one person as too little choice can appear to another as too much. What one sees as a pile of wreckage, another regards as a path to be cleared, but even so, there appears no tool with which to readily cut

through the multitude of obstacles, leaving one to clear the path with one's bare hands. Facing a job so big, with so many possible starting points, one begins to doubt, then becomes indecisive, and finally is paralysed.

I see this as a helpful metaphor to pin down that abstract, slippery concept known as New Zealand. Although some are entranced by this nation's peculiarities—its small population, its dependency on (and need for protection by) foreign countries, its distance from them, its relatively short history—what appear as unique properties belonging to New Zealand can equally be regarded as external limitations stemming from its relation to the outer world. The latter description summarises in high-minded terms what seems obvious, even stupidly true: when all the campaign banners have fallen away, the prospects for transforming this country in the direction of socialism appear slim in global capitalism. In international terms, there might be little significance for what Lenin called this 'country of inveterate, backwoods, thick-headed, egotistical philistines, who have brought their "civilisation" with them from England and keep it to themselves like a dog in a manger'.

Indeed, the question might not be 'what is to be done?' but what is to be *done here*, and, more importantly, so what? Socialism in America or Europe would mean socialism in New Zealand, and not the other way around. From Lenin's historical standpoint, that of revolution, who would we be kidding?

Well, it all depends on how you look at it. If we set aside all of New Zealand's peculiarities, the remaining kernel, the most abstract, is the most significant. The New Zealand example is useful *as an example*, a microcosm for the Left, as a spatial metaphor for a problem that is essentially historical, a particular manifestation of a problem that is universal in character.

Certainly, some have recognised the potential for this device, if merely for the purposes of triumphalism. Most obvious is the social democratic point of view, which has more or less imagined the path to socialism as a series of baby

steps—in which case, the smaller the country, the easier the steps. Assuming all bets are off, we can't ignore the evidence commonly given for this point of view, such as the history of this country's union movement and its first Labour government. But here we risk accepting the fraught terms of mainstream progressive historiography—a tendency the Left has often uncritically embraced, much like its approach to progressive politics in general (itself the inevitable result of the loss of its historical working-class base).

In this imagination, New Zealand is a petri dish, a way of 'testing out' capitalism or socialism. You name it: the 'Wakefield plan', the Treaty of Waitangi, arbitration and conciliation, the massive mid-20th-century welfare state, Rogernomics, and more. But a petri dish is only useful to the scientist insofar as it demonstrates what exists out in the wild. We might do well to remember that so many 'innovations' down under owed their existence to the dynamics of capital abroad and the resulting global political response: What was 'systematic colonisation' if not an attempt to resolve the unrest industrial capitalism had wrought upon England via Edward Gibbon Wakefield's repurposing (i.e., reification) of Adam Smith? The Treaty of Waitangi an attempt by the Crown to avoid repeating the disaster of Australia? The 'land without strikes' an effort to prevent the labour unrest rocking other countries? Michael Joseph Savage's welfare state no less a response to the global Great Depression than the New Deal? Roger Douglas's neoliberal reforms an attempt to adapt to the economic shocks that began in the 1970s?

Conditioned to expect countries to appear as glistening, fully-formed pearls, some on the Left might, upon realising that capitalism's 'national characteristics' in New Zealand are no less extensions of the global economic and political order, become melancholic—unaware of the irony that their insistence to be convinced of the plausibility of socialism in one country involves comparison with every other. But 'every analogy is lame'. All comparisons are limited, all are conditioned by what they are not.

If the Left exists as nothing but froth upon history, we can, at least, recognise in it what forces have coalesced. Even the foam of the waves that lap at our shores are the product of international currents; indeed, of lunar cycles. In the same way, every layer in the ongoing process of capital accumulation begins to turn invisible forces into visible results. Echoing this, the neurotic self-doubt that afflicts the Left might be turned outwards, made productive, even if just to record the memory of failure so that future generations can retrieve it.

Were one to proceed from this foundation, one would hardly need to be troubled by the limiting factors of distance, size, isolation, and all else that might plausibly arrest the development of class consciousness in our corner of the world. Nor would the failures of the past appear as a burden. Wisdom is knowing what you don't know. Doubt, then, can yet be used for purposes other than neurotic self-paralysis.

Who knows, after all? Doubt, that most radical form of questioning—the one thing we can all agree on—might prove the most effective

organizing tool of all. Through appealing to activists, students, and the working class alike on the basis of failure, one might have the upper hand over all hitherto efforts: it would, at least, appear honest. This convenient byproduct, furthermore, would allow for contrast, not comparison, with the NGO-ists, career politicians, and academics who have grafted themselves onto 'socialism' via their claims to have defeated doubt once and for all.

I don't expect success. That much I know.

In Platypus, we wear the badge of Marxism not proudly, but warily, since, from the standpoint of the present, Marxism appears to have been falsified. But so, too, might we redeem Marxism, since history poses—tasks—this potential for overcoming. After all, we, too, are guided as much by our wants as the fact that the present leaves us wanting. These wants, if we can recognise them for what they are, pile up like a monumental scrap-heap on the road to revolution. They are the tasks left behind by yesterday.

'What is to be done,' then?

Well, *you asked!*



System Change Aotearoa

ELLIOT CROSSAN

*You have to act as if it were possible
to radically transform the world.
And you have to do it all the time.*

These words, spoken by Angela Davis eleven years ago, contain the most important message that NZ socialists need to hear in 2025. The radical left far too often approaches questions of strategy and organisation with a pessimistic, defeatist mentality. Too often we act as if change is simply not possible in this country. It is urgently necessary for us to shake off this mentality.

David Seymour behaves as if it is possible for his party to radically transform Aotearoa. Before the pandemic ACT was a party reduced to one solitary MP, surviving thanks to its pact with National in Epsom, having received a mere 0.5% of the party vote in 2017.

Half a decade later, Seymour is setting the terrain on which the central political struggles of our time are fought. ACT's Treaty Principles Bill is polarising the nation in a similar way to how the Brexit debate polarised the UK. A myriad of other attacks on Māori are sneaking through the legislative process under the cover of this most incendiary Bill. ACT has transformed itself in half a decade; what was a dying party in 2019 is now the driving force behind reactionary politics in Aotearoa today.

Last year saw the Coalition's austerity programme—the harshest per-capita budget cuts in our nation's history—combine with the Reserve Bank's steep increases in the Official Cash Rate between 2021 and 2023 to throw Aotearoa into an economic downturn more severe than any comparable developed country

is currently experiencing. Whilst our public services are being aggressively squeezed, ACT is again seizing the initiative; Seymour has stated that his priority for this year is to privatise the healthcare system, and is lobbying for a mass sell off of state housing. ACT is acting as an advance guard, clearing the way for National to pose as 'moderate' while the Coalition as a whole implements an extreme right-wing agenda.

This rapid intensification of New Zealand neoliberalism, alongside a vicious backlash against decades of progress towards a partial, inadequate honouring of Te Tiriti o Waitangi by the Crown, is only possible because of determined organisation on the right. 1999-2019 was a period of relative social peace in Aotearoa, marked by successive governments taking a 'moderate' approach and staying in the 'centre ground' in the wake of the neoliberal revolution of 1984-1999. Instead of giving up hope of seeing its agenda implemented in those lean years, ACT used that time to organise and plan—meaning the party was ready once crisis struck to advance the agenda of the most pitiless wing of the NZ capitalist class.

Aotearoa is now well within the throes of the social and economic crisis that the right spent 20 years waiting for. On the left, we were not ready. We were not prepared to advance socialist politics when the time came. Some valiant attempts to organise were made, but on the whole we were scattered and divided when the moment arrived. Yet ready or not, we do not have a choice. The time has come in which we can either make the case for radical change—for a socialist transformation of society in order to bring about social, economic, environmental and Treaty justice—or surrender to the radical right. We can either act with courage and determination, or give in to defeatism

and despair. We must choose the former option. We must fight back. To do so, we must urgently address the division and disorganisation on the socialist left.

System Change Aotearoa is seeking to re-energise the conversation about the need for a new socialist party. We are not declaring ourselves to be this party; we are not interested in being another small sect which thinks it holds all the answers yet is unable to grow to anything like the scale needed in this time of crisis. We wish to talk to and work with other organisations and activists across the country to create something serious and lasting.

We acknowledge that multiple different political projects in tension with one another is not necessarily a bad thing in a period where the left is grappling with strategy. We can and must work together in solidarity across different parties and projects; we can be honest about political disagreements while respecting each other's commitment to the kaupapa.

A number of activists have recently joined the Labour Party in order to try and reclaim it as the party of the working class in Aotearoa. System Change believes that this strategy is unlikely to work, as the lack of any existing socialist faction within the Labour caucus, and the tight control that the incumbent caucus has over leadership elections, candidate selections, and policy formation, means that there is no opening for a left-wing leadership of the party to emerge. We believe that the working class needs an independent voice in politics, and that this aim can only be achieved through the formation of a socialist party that is united on the basis of the struggle against capitalism, rather than by operating within a party which is dominated by those who seek merely to tinker around the edges of the fundamentally broken system.

However, the stakes are simply too high for anyone to pretend that they alone have the sole answer to all of our problems. We support any and all shifts to the left made by the Labour Party, and hope to work alongside activists who are pursuing a different overall strategy to us. The same goes

for those working within the Greens and Te Pāti Māori, and for those who are against the concept of parties altogether.

One area where the left needs to work together regardless of party affiliations or lack thereof is in building a mass movement against austerity and privatisation. This is because, in the face of the biggest neoliberal assault that the working class of Aotearoa has faced since the early 1990s, a mass anti-austerity movement is sorely lacking. The past year has seen huge protests take place against the government's attacks on Te Tiriti, the Fast-track Approvals Bill, and the Coalition's complicity in the Gaza genocide. We wholeheartedly support each of these movements, and will support the advancement of each struggle in turn. Yet the response to the Coalition's economic agenda has been muted.

This is particularly a problem for socialists, because it is through the struggle of workers to topple the capitalist system that we believe a better world can emerge. The 2010s saw the return of mass socialist and working—class politics in a myriad of different forms across Europe and America, as a direct consequence of the neoliberal paradigm beginning to fragment in the wake of the Global Financial Crisis. The austerity policies imposed across the western world in this period represented a ruling class squeeze on workers' living standards; this combination of economic crisis and austerity exposed the notion that neoliberal capitalism could act as a rising tide, lifting all boats, to be a lie. As a result, mass movements emerged in the streets resisting cuts and demanding an alternative. These movements found their political expression in sudden explosions in the popularity of previously obscure socialist politicians such as Sanders, Corbyn, and many others.

The conditions in Aotearoa were not the same in the 2010s. While workers in the majority of advanced economies were suffering, New Zealand capitalism was held up as a model of a 'rockstar economy'. The austerity policies of the Key-English government were mild in comparison to what was seen in Europe. The opposite

is true in the 2020s. The ruling class of New Zealand have chosen this moment to manufacture a crisis and use it to redistribute wealth upwards. We should therefore prepare for the possibility that, just as mass anti-austerity movements and left-reformist politics emerged overseas in the 2010s, similar phenomena will occur here this decade.

As Marxists, the revival of reformist social democracy in the form of the Sanders-Corbyn phenomenon is not our end goal. However, both the revival of mass street politics, and a return to the days when socialist ideas found expression in mainstream political discourse, will undoubtedly create openings for more revolutionary ideas to proliferate. It is the norm, rather than an aberration, that working—class movements resisting capitalism in times of crisis turn first towards reformism for answers, before some begin to look for revolutionary solutions. Marxists in Aotearoa should therefore view the potential emergence of anti-austerity movements, and a revival of left-reformism in one form or another, as hugely positive developments which could, under the right circumstances, help revolutionary socialist politics to thrive. We are not just observers of history; we are participants. We cannot sit idly by and hope that the material conditions inevitably lead to the outcomes we wish to see. It is therefore a vital task in 2025 for socialists to try and build organisations and movements specifically dedicated to opposing the Coalition's agenda of privatisation and austerity.

In 2024, System Change worked with community groups in Tāmaki Makaurau to organise small rallies against the government's attacks on Whaikaha (the Ministry for Disabled People), against the 'traffic light' benefit sanctions system, and against policies which have increased homelessness. We attempted to tie these issues together as part of the capitalist agenda to make the rich richer. We aim in 2025 to work with other activists in Tāmaki Makaurau and across the motu on the task of turning these small protests into mass mobilisations against the government. We also aim to engage in a dialogue with like-minded

socialist activists and organisations on how to put class politics into the centre of the political debate more broadly.

Make no mistake—what is happening in Aotearoa today is a vicious class war. The ACT Party is acting as the Coalition's 'radical flank' in an extremely effective way, pulling the entire political debate as far to the right as possible. One effect of the Treaty Principles Bill—though this is by no means its only purpose—is to, in the words of Steve Bannon, *flood the zone with shit*. NZ First's xenophobic and transphobic rhetoric plays the same role. The Coalition are baiting the left into using all of our energy defending marginalised communities, creating a culture war to divide the working class against itself, and pre-empting any attempts to mobilise en masse against a government which operates totally and unambiguously in the interests of the super-rich.

Let 2025 be the year in which we stop dancing to Seymour's music. That does not mean abandoning our defence of Te Tiriti, and it does not mean giving an inch of ground to the hateful rhetoric and policies of the three-headed right-wing monster. What it *does* mean is attempting to set the agenda ourselves by mobilising a broad-based working class coalition to fight against racism and austerity, and to fight for a better world for all. Let this be the year in which tens of thousands of us march for an end to the housing crisis; for better wages and conditions for all workers; for universal, well-funded public services; for public ownership; for dignity for beneficiaries and disabled people; and for the corporate elites to pay for it.

In Aotearoa, as across the world, the rapidly-radicalising capitalist class are driving society into the ground with their insatiable desire for even more wealth and power than they already have. Austerity-era neoliberal policies are rapidly accelerating already extreme levels of inequality. Techbro billionaires such as Elon Musk and Peter Thiel are financing far-right parties in order to channel the growing anger in society towards whichever minority is the latest scapegoat. We must not let them succeed. They can only be stopped when the working class is organised and

ready to fight for an alternative. It is our task to lay whatever groundwork we can for this alternative.

Above all other crises looms the impending breakdown of our planet's ecosystems. The capitalist drive for endless profit is quite literally threatening the future of organised human life on earth. We must remember that, amidst the optimistic rhetoric of the *Communist Manifesto*, Marx and Engels made the observation 177 years ago that throughout history, class struggle has: *'each time ended, either in a revolutionary reconstitution of society at large, or in the common ruin of the contending classes.'* The climate crisis presents us with the very real possibility that the common ruin of both the capitalist class and the working class will occur within our lifetimes. The urgency of this impending catastrophe must sit at the back of our minds in every conversation about strategy and organisation.

For those of us who believe that building a new socialist party is the way forward, we simply do not have time to sit around and wait for someone else to do it. Unlike ACT, we do not have the luxury of being able to wait around for the fruits

of a 20-year strategy to ripen. We do not have time for infighting. We need to have these conversations now, we need to unite, and we need to act decisively to bring about the change our society so desperately needs.

The strategic priorities of System Change Aotearoa are thus:

1. Work with other activists, organisations and community groups to build a mass movement against austerity and privatisation, while advancing demands for wealth redistribution and stronger workers' rights.
2. Do whatever we can to strengthen existing movements for Te Tiriti, Palestine and the environment, while highlighting the fact that the global ruling class is to blame for imperialism and environmental destruction.
3. When the time is right, join with others across the motu to create a mass socialist party which can fight to change the system once and for all.

History will not absolve us if we fail to bring about the end of capitalism, and instead live to witness the end of the world.

Emmy Rākete

Like innumerable tens of thousands of people, I was in Wellington with my family last year to join the Hikoī mō te Tiriti. We marched in a vast mass, a crowd so enormous it was impossible to delineate a beginning or an end. When we arrived at parliament after marching for an hour, friends reported that the back of the hikoī had only just left Waitangi Square. The atmosphere was familiar to those of us who have participated in large demonstrations. Jodi Dean calls it the ‘egalitarian discharge’ produced by the collective subject that emerges when people gather in a crowd—the joy of being part of a greater whole. We became a collective entity, delighting in the way that being gathered together made us into a disindividual whole. As we gathered at parliament, a rupture opened up in the political order. Parliament was not a place, separate from the masses, where politics was contained. We had busted in. We spilled out, over the lawn, over the fences, over adjacent roads and public spaces. A being with thousands and thousands of bodies formed, concentrated at Parliament, and then—slowly, imperceptibly, inevitably—it disintegrated. People’s feet hurt, they had to catch a flight, their son or daughter needed a lift across town—whatever the reasons, the constituent elements of the crowd broke apart and the collective being that we had been dissipated.

This is the lifecycle of every protest, demonstration, or crowd event. This wasn’t a trajectory unique to the Hikoī mō te Tiriti. We gathered, we roared our approval to a series of speakers who denounced the racist Treaty Principles Bill, and then we left. I have done this dozens of times. I want us to hold this beautiful moment of rupture in our minds, that egalitarian discharge of the mighty crowd, as we think about what is to be done. I was moved to write this article because last week, the deadline for public submissions on the Treaty Principles Bill was scheduled to close.

So many of us chose to submit that Parliament’s website went down, and the deadline had to be extended. Sitting in the lounge, typing up what I hoped was a measured submission, I reflected on the two moments—the gap in history that opened up before the power of the masses, and how that gap seemed to have closed as I sat there writing my submission. Power. The power to choose, the power to shape society, to shape the economy, to alter the course of events. Is this what it looks like?

I expect that, given the hundreds of thousands of submissions that the select committee has received, my individual submission will not be read. The words I used will not enter into the conscious mind of any of the MPs who will vote for or against the Treaty Principles Bill. At best, I will be part of a statistical mass of those who voiced their opposition to the bill. I doubt, too, whether there are any persuadable MPs who have yet to truly decide what they think. Like casting a ballot, my submission on the Treaty Principles Bill is a request to power, but not power itself. This is not a critique of Toitū Te Tiriti, the organisers of the hikoī. They have responded to the situation perfectly. What we need is to be able to go *beyond the situation*. There is a place where power lies, and there is a process we may participate in, but there is no means by which the masses can actually *exercise* power. Our access to power is mediated, both by the structure of representative electoral democracy and by the processes and institutions of that state.

As communists, our interests are those of the working class—the vast majority of the population who live, work, and die to enrich the capitalist class. Is this process—this mediated, indirect petition, with no mechanism to control the actions of the state—is this how we can see those interests enacted? I was thinking recently about something the historian Bruce Jesson once said about New Zealand. He called it the ‘hollow

society,' hollow because of the encompassing power of the state and the weakness of civil society. Established through conquest, colonial society does not predate the centralised administration that was necessary to wage war against Māori. The government existed as a commanding unity of repressive and administrative power before any meaningful independent organisations did—clubs, volunteer societies, labour unions, and even the churches were all insignificant compared to the colonial administration. New Zealand has a highly concentrated state apparatus, with few meaningful forms of delegation to lower bodies. Even city councils are largely tasked with executing plans determined by Cabinet. Even New Zealand's trade union movement was, from the 1930s onwards, too often an appendage of state rule. Prior generations of Marxists decried our often compliant and cooperative trade unions as merely another layer of management.

The hollowness of New Zealand's society has two consequences for the left. Firstly, it means that power is concentrated almost solely in the Cabinet of the ruling Government. We have few low-hanging fruit where meaningful political power could be grasped. There will be no People's Republic of Hamilton. Secondly, it means that New Zealanders are ill-equipped to participate in organised struggle. We lack precedent for uprisings, with a few honourable exceptions from which we will need to learn, and we lack the organisational forms required to carry uprisings out. Politics in New Zealand, moreso than in most of the world, is a thing that is done by other people, in line with decisions other people have made. Government policy is not the outcome of any kind of mass participatory process but comes primarily from ministers themselves. Where the state is concerned—where the matter of state power is concerned—the working class does not have its hands on the wheel. The state is a dictatorship of the capitalist class, governed by laws—both formal and informal—that ensure the interests of that class. The electoral process is not capable of ending that dictatorship, and the rich will not consent to a vote for them to cease

being rich. We are in a situation which can only be smashed, and live in a society which is unusually bad at smashing things.

While the egalitarian discharge of the crowd opens up a gap in the political order of the ruling class, the crowd itself does not produce politics. Crowds are a precondition of revolutionary social transformations, but crowds do not create new worlds. The egalitarian discharge, that beautiful moment of possibility where we see that we are not merely ourselves but are part of a greater collective, can only be the start of something. Crowds cannot exercise power. A massive demonstration can occur, but if the ruling class is able to redefine it in retrospect, nothing will change. Tsar Nicholas II was able to turn the 1905 Russian Revolution, a crowd event demanding social change, into a mere call for an advisory assembly whose advice he promptly ignored. Crowds dissipate, and their meaning is open to contestation, liable to be stuffed back into the closet by the ruling class or dissipated by liberals who fear open revolt. As the climate crisis unfolds, neoliberal austerity wrecks the living conditions of the masses, and the state leans more and more upon violent repression in order to hold capitalism together, we will need to develop a new orientation towards power. When the masses come together in a crowd, the radical left needs to present them with a plan for the conquest of state power and a new, equal social order.

So, should we all euthanise ourselves? Of course not. While the situation for the radical left is not yet good, there are tendencies here which we can work with. The radical left is stuck in the post-Occupy politics of horizontalism and movementism—we make demands of the state, but have no strategy for actually taking and exercising state power for ourselves. This self-limiting politics has run its time out, and we should be ready to move beyond it. Our organisational energy may be mostly channelled into social movement campaigns—but we're fucking good at them. We are skilled theorists, organisers, and campaigners. We must unify the advanced elements of the radical left into an

organised body which intends not just to criticise the powerful, but to actually take power. This is what Mao Zedong termed the subjective factor of revolution, the human element that is capable of defying circumstance to make impossible things happen. But more than this subjective element, we have the objective element. The capitalists can have cops, courts, prisons, helicopters, guns—none of it matters, because we have the masses. The ruling class relies on making the poor poorer so the rich can get richer. In serving their own interests, they serve ours too. The immiseration of the working class is serving to pull us all into a tighter organic unity, providing a material basis for the politics of solidarity. As the darkness of

neoliberal austerity deepens, the rubble of social democracy fades from view and the communist horizon grows clearer.

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Tāmaki Makaurau Anarchists

HENRY LAWS

An Anarchist Communist Perspective

It has been over a year since a right-wing convergence government was formed in Aotearoa.¹ Throughout this period, it has been implementing a neoliberal, tough on crime, anti-environmental, anti-Tiriti and pro-American imperialist agenda.² Its efforts have been opposed through various forms of collective action like strikes, working to rule, university occupations, the Hikoī mō te Tiriti, rallies, marches, blockades and more.³ However, socialists in Aotearoa today are a subculture that is scattered across sects, infoshops, publishing houses, informal networks, media outlets and single-issue/single-area community groups.⁴ The political practice of these sects and other groups consists of engaging in defensive and reformist forms of action. This is because such action is disconnected from systemic theoretical analyses which can produce visions of socialism and theories of revolution that can be implemented to abolish the capitalist system and build a socialist society. This article provides an anarchist communist perspective on addressing these issues.⁵

My perspective is informed by my participation in Tāmaki Makaurau Anarchists/TMA.⁶ The group's formation began in 2017, when four anarchists met and decided that a social anarchist organisation was needed due to there being none in Tāmaki Makaurau/Auckland

in the late 2010s.⁷ A reading group and a public meeting resulted in a two-year process of creating the group's principles and constitution. While this was being done, it organised reading groups, demonstrations, board game nights, film screenings, day schools, education sessions, parties, the Anarchy Camp in 2019 (the first nationwide anarchist gathering in Aotearoa in a decade) and other events. By May 2019, it had reached agreement on its principles and constitution and publicly launched as Tāmaki Makaurau Anarchists.⁸ Post-launch, the group continued to organise the kind of events that it had prior to launching, with some members also helping to organise the 2023 Tāmaki Anarchist Bookfair, the first anarchist bookfair in the city in decades. Like many other socialist groups, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, it went through a cycle of growth, stagnation and decline. As a result of this, and due to the group not having agreed on a strategy, I am writing this article in an individual capacity.

The first reason why socialists in Aotearoa engage in a reformist political practice is that such practice is not informed by theory and analysis. More specifically, socialist groups that have education sessions on theory do not develop members' theoretical and analytical skills so that they can create theory and analysis relevant to their situation. As a result, they cannot effectively change the world because their organising is not grounded in an understanding of our society, its historical origins and future possibilities. This can be addressed through several measures. First, socialists should teach their members critical thinking skills so that they can evaluate the merits and issues with ideas.⁹ Second, socialists should develop their theory through evaluating which elements of historical and contemporary

socialist theory should be accepted, rejected or changed based on whether or not there is evidence for it and if it is logically consistent.¹⁰ Third, socialists should use their theory to understand society through engaging in a structural analysis.¹¹ Fourth, socialists should use their structural analysis to understand the current political situation through engaging in a conjunctural analysis.¹² This will allow them to understand our society, which will enable them to more effectively decide on actions that will change it.

The second reason for the reformist political practice of socialists in Aotearoa is that their practice is not guided by a theoretically-grounded and practically-oriented vision of socialism. To clarify, although some socialist groups have a vision (while most do not), they are so vague and disconnected from a structural and conjunctural analysis that they are not helpful in guiding discussions and decisions around which tactics and strategies to use and are unpersuasive to non-socialist workers. This can be addressed through socialists using the structural and conjunctural analysis they have developed to create a socialist utopia. This utopia should not be seen as a blueprint for a perfect society, but instead as a provisional conception of a socialist society that is a method for critiquing society today and guiding tactical and strategic discussions and actions to abolish it.¹³ Such a utopia should be informed by historical and contemporary theorisations of what a future socialist society could be.¹⁴ It should also be grounded in previous attempts to construct a socialist society during social revolutions and worker's uprisings as well as analyses of these.¹⁵ By creating such a utopia in the course of intersectional class struggle, socialists will have clarity regarding their ends.¹⁶

The third reason why socialists in Aotearoa engage in a reformist political practice is that their practice is not guided by a substantive and context-specific theory of revolution. While many socialist groups here identify themselves as revolutionary, most conceptions of revolution are limited to general statements that are not situated in Aotearoa's context. As a result, they

are unable to orient these groups' political practice so they can effectively help prepare workers to either make a revolution or be ready to act when it happens. This problem can be addressed through creating a contemporary theory of revolution. This can be done through using the structural analysis, conjunctural analysis and a vision that has been developed previously to evaluate historical and contemporary socialist theories of revolution, to see which elements of such theories should be incorporated, rejected or modified for a theory of revolution today.¹⁷ This theory can be enriched through using structural and conjunctural analyses as well as a vision to critically evaluate the successes, failures and limits of historical and contemporary social revolutions and uprisings in order to avoid repeating past failures and mistakes.¹⁸ Ultimately, creating this theory will allow socialists to orient their practice towards a revolutionary horizon.

The fourth reason for the reformist political practice of socialists in Aotearoa is their tactics and organising methods. As they have not developed an interconnected theory, tactics, strategy and vision, when the state and capital attack workers, socialists engage in collective actions like rallies, marches and isolated direct actions. When these fail, socialists learn organising methods from unions and non-governmental organisations that aim to reform capitalism, not abolish it. As a result, socialists are stuck in a self-perpetuating cycle of reformism. This cycle can be broken through the following measures. First, the structural and conjunctural analysis, vision and theory of revolution should be used to criticise these organising methods and tactics.¹⁹ Second, this critique should be used to develop organising methods and tactics that are in unity with revolutionary socialist ends.²⁰ An integral part of doing this will be learning about and developing socialist theories of practice, which argue that society is reproduced by people's practice and that workers consciousness, drives and capacities can be transformed through revolutionary practice like strategically-grounded direct action and prefiguration.²¹ Through such

revolutionary practice, workers will learn how to be driven to and become capable of abolishing the capitalist system and creating socialism through revolution.²²

The fifth reason why socialists here engage in reformist political practice is that most socialist groups are not doing what has been proposed above. More specifically, most Marxist groups either focus on defensive actions or have inward-looking meetings, while the only such group anarchists have here is TMA, which is in one city and is not currently accepting new members.²³ This can be resolved through creating socialist political organisations that are devoted to creating, interconnecting and applying revolutionary theory, vision, strategy and tactics. Among anarchists, since the 1860s, there has been the organisational dualism tendency, which argues that because unions and other workers organisations are necessary but insufficient to achieve revolution, specifically anarchist political organisations should be built. These should unite anarchists to develop theory and practice, coordinate joint action among themselves and within social movements and push the intersectional class struggle towards a revolutionary direction through persuasion and engaging in direct

action that inspires fellow workers by example.²⁴ However, there are disagreements over how to do this, as expressed in tendencies like platformism, synthesisism and *especificismo*.²⁵ Through creating such groups, socialists will be able to develop and interconnect revolutionary theory and practice that is rooted in intersectional class struggle.

In conclusion, while building socialist political organisations is important, such organisations in Aotearoa have up to this point failed to transcend the sect-form.²⁶ A possible pathway to addressing this could be for socialist political organisations to create a formal process where they have regular sessions in which they discuss historical and contemporary forms of organising and their ongoing activity, reflect on what has worked and what they have learned from their failures and then apply their reflections through continually iterating their organisation's structure and practice so that they can develop an organisation that is suited to their local context.²⁷ While there are many other important issues for socialists in Aotearoa to address, this article has focused on theory, vision, strategy and tactics in particular because we cannot change the world if we do not understand it, know what we want to change it into or how to effectively change it.²⁸

- 1 Right-wing convergence is a concept developed by British anti-fascist theorist and lawyer David Renton in order to describe two political phenomena: 1. Cooperation between the centre-right and far-right and 2. The centre-right being politically radicalised by the far-right. For an overview of this concept, see this article: <https://counterfutures.nz/10/CF%2010%20Barton.pdf>, a review of this book: <https://www.plutobooks.com/9780745338156/the-new-authoritarians/>
- 2 The right-wing convergence government's agenda is detailed and critiqued in this article: <https://www.lof200.nz/articles/will-this-be-a-one-term-government>, although, for the reasons that are outlined later in this article, I disagree with the reformist politics that are espoused in the 'We Need An Alternative' section of the article.
- 3 Examples of such collective action can be found in these articles: <https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/in-depth/537717/hui-protests-kotahitanga-and-a-new-kuini-a-historic-year-for-maoridom>, <https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/national/536160/nurses-begin-rolling-strikes-in-auckland-today>, <https://www.lof200.nz/articles/hey-david-leave-those-kids-alone>, <https://www.greenpeace.org/aotearoa/act/march-for-nature/>, <https://thespinoff.co.nz/politics/25-10-2023/thousands-take-part-in-pro-palestine-demonstrations-across-aotearoa>, <https://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/lyttelton-port-christchurch-pro-palestine-protest-four-men-charged-after-clashes-with-police/L3FIDK2VHZEKJIDG4KZTM54RCGY/>, <https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/political/536880/thousands-of-mbie-workers-begin-strike-action-after-0-pay-offer>
- 4 The most up-to-date article analysing the political composition of contemporary socialism in Aotearoa can be found here: <https://notessouthfromnowhere.wordpress.com/2022/06/26/a-sectological-survey-of-nz-2022/>
- 5 An overview of anarchist communism can be found in these articles: <https://libcom.org/article/anarchist-communism-introduction> and <https://libcom.org/article/libertarian-communism-introduction>
- 6 For more information on Tāmaki Makaurau Anarchists, see these websites and social media pages: <https://tamakimakaurauanarchists.org.nz/>, <https://www.facebook.com/AucklandAnarchists/>, <https://x.com/AKLANarchists>, https://www.instagram.com/tamaki_makaurau_anarchists/
- 7 For more on social anarchism (an anti-authority, anti-state and anti-capitalist form of anarchism that supports establishing a collectivist or communist economy through a social revolution in order to realise individual autonomy through establishing a non-hierarchical community) and how it differs from individualist anarchism, see section 'A.3.1 What are the differences between individualist and social anarchists?' of this book: <https://www.anarchistfaq.org/afaq/sectionA.html#seca31> For more on the history of anarchism in Aotearoa, see the following books, chapters and Masters dissertations: <https://libcom.org/article/rabble-rousers-and-merry-pranksters-history-anarchism-aotearoanew-zealand-mid-1950s-early>, https://www.academia.edu/7438430/Carnival_and_Class_Anarchism_and_Councilism_in_Australasia_during_the_1970s and <https://notessouthfromnowhere.wordpress.com/2018/03/08/left-out-the-extra-parliamentary-left-in-aotearoa-nz-from-1999-to-2008/>
- 8 For more information about Tāmaki Makaurau Anarchists' formation and early years, see this interview that the group did with *The Commoner*: <https://www.thecommoner.org.uk/an-interview-with-the-tamaki-makaurau-anarchists/>
- 9 For more on anarchist pedagogies (the methods and approaches of teaching), see this book: <https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/robert-h-haworth-anarchist-pedagogies>
- 10 This is discussed in greater depth in 'Chapter 11: Conclusion' of this book: <https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/zoe-baker-means-and-ends#toc51> My theoretical standpoint is outlined through a critique of Dutch council communist Anton Pannekoek's formulation of historical materialism in my review of the book *The Workers' Way to Freedom and Other Council Communist Writings* by Pannekoek: <https://buttondown.com/Fightback/archive/a-telescope-to-a-communist-future-review-of-anton>, while a selection of articles, books and videos on this topic can be found in footnotes xxxix, xl, xli, xlii and xliii of that review.
- 11 For more on an anarchist conception of structural analysis, see the 'Structure/Structural Analysis' section of this article: <https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/coordenacao-anarquista-brasileira-for-a-theory-of-strategy#toc5> For an example, see the '2. Structural Analysis' section of the Black Rose Anarchist Federation's program: <https://www.blackrosefed.org/about/program/2-structural-analysis/>
- 12 For more on an anarchist conception of conjunctural analysis, see the 'Conjuncture/Conjunctural Analysis' section of this article: <https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/coordenacao-anarquista-brasileira-for-a-theory-of-strategy#toc6> For an example, see this article: <https://www.blackrosefed.org/conjunctural-analysis-2025-crises-and-collective-action/>
- 13 This conception of utopia as a materialist method to create a socialist society is discussed in further depth in this article: <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/00380261221079115>

- 14 I have sketched out my conception of a future socialist society through a critique of Anton Pannekoek's conception of workers' councils in my review of *The Workers' Way to Freedom and Other Council Communist Writings*: <https://buttondown.com/Fightback/archive/a-telescope-to-a-communist-future-review-of-anton>, while a selection of articles and books on this topic can be found in footnote li of that review. In addition, there has been a substantial increase in discussions about how to envision socialist planning in the 21st century and beyond since the late 2010s. An informative article that provides an overview of the current state of the debate can be found here: <https://www.exploring-economics.org/de/entdecken/rethinking-democratic-economic-planning-an-overview/>. The following websites are devoted to discussing and compiling resources on this topic: <https://www.indep.network/>, <https://www.democratic-planning.com/> and <https://www.planningresearch.net/>
- 15 For more on this topic, see the following books: <https://libcom.org/article/ours-master-and-own-workers-control-commune-present>, <https://www.bloomsbury.com/au/alternative-labour-history-9781783601547/> and <https://www.versobooks.com/en-gb/products/2368-they-can-t-represent-us>
- 16 For more on intersectional class struggle, see this article: <https://roarmag.org/essays/intersectional-class-struggle/>, this talk: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xlvq86giIBo> and this book: <https://www.akpress.org/intersectional-class-struggle.html>
- 17 A reconstruction of the theory of social revolution that was developed by anarchists in Europe and the United States from the 1860's to the 1930's can be found in the 'Social Revolution' section of 'Chapter 4: Anarchist Strategy' in this book: <https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/zoe-baker-means-and-ends#toc17> I have outlined the theory of social revolution that I support through a critique of Anton Pannekoek's theory of revolution in my review of *The Workers' Way to Freedom and Other Council Communist Writings*: <https://buttondown.com/Fightback/archive/a-telescope-to-a-communist-future-review-of-anton>, while a selection of articles, books and videos on this topic can be found in footnotes xlvii and xlvi of that review. A book on this topic will be published in late April 2025: <https://www.versobooks.com/en-gb/products/977-the-future-of-revolution>
- 18 A non-exhaustive list of examples include the 1871 Paris Commune, the 1917-1921 Russian Revolution, the 1917-1921 Ukrainian Revolution, the 1918 German Revolution, the 1929-1931 Shinmin/Manchurian Revolution, the 1936-1939 Spanish Revolution, the 1945-1949 Chinese Revolution and 1966-1976 Cultural Revolution there, the 1956 Hungarian Revolution, the May 1968 uprising in France, the 1974 Carnation Revolution, the 1979 Iranian Revolution, the 1994-present Zapatista uprising, the early 2010s Occupy Movement and Arab Spring, the 2012-present Rojava Revolution and the 2021 Black Lives Matter uprising. Books and articles on these revolutions and uprisings can be found here: <https://www.amazon.co.uk/Massacre-Life-Death-Paris-Commune/dp/030021944X>, <https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/mitchell-abidor-voices-of-the-paris-commune>, <https://libcom.org/article/russian-revolution-1917-reading-guide>, <https://libcom.org/article/german-revolution-1918-reading-guide>, <https://libcom.org/article/spanish-civil-war-1936-39-reading-guide>, <https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/francesco-dalessandro-the-forgotten-anarchist-commune-in-manchuria>, <https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/dongyounhwang-anarchism-in-korea-book>, <https://libcom.org/article/china-reading-guide>, <https://chuangcn.org/resources/>, <https://libcom.org/article/hungary-1956-reading-guide>, <https://libcom.org/article/france-1968-reading-guide>, <https://www.plutobooks.com/9780745338576/a-peoples-history-of-the-portuguese-revolution/>, <https://illwill.com/iran>, <https://roarmag.org/essays/a-community-in-arms-the-indigenous-roots-of-the-ezln/>, <https://freedomnews.org.uk/2024/08/19/explainer-new-zapatista-autonomy/>, https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-319-75620-2_40, <https://www.bloomsbury.com/uk/kurds-of-northern-syria-9781788314831/>, <https://www.unityandstruggle.org/2022/07/big-brick-energy-a-multi-city-study-of-the-2020-george-floyd-uprising/>
- 19 Examples of such critiques can be found in these articles: <https://www.unityandstruggle.org/2019/03/new-tools-needed-community-organizing/>, <https://jacobin.com/2017/05/saul-alinsky-alinskyism-organizing-methods-cesar-chavez-ufw>, <https://jacobin.com/2017/07/community-organizing-staff-professionals-social-movements> and <https://theecologist.org/2018/jul/10/rethinking-alinsky-community-organising>
- 20 Examples of developing such organising methods can be found in this toolkit and the resources listed below it: <https://www.unityandstruggle.org/organizer-training/> as well as in this two-volume book: <https://fullspectrumresistance.org/the-book/>, a review of which can be found here: <https://roarmag.org/essays/full-spectrum-resistance-review/>
- 21 For an anarchist formulation of the theory of practice, see the section of 'The Theory of Practice' in "Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework" of this book: <https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/zoe-baker-means-and-ends#toc10> For a Marxist formulation of the theory of practice, see 'Marx's Theory of Practice' in this article: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/1467-8675.12319> For more on strategic prefiguration, see the 'Unity of Means and Ends' and 'Prefiguration' sections of 'Chapter 4: Anarchist Strategy' in this book: <https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/zoe-baker-means-and-ends#toc19>, this video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fkM1VW7znZI> and this book: <https://www.wiley.com/en-be/Prefigurative+Politics:+Building+Tomorrow+Today-p-9781509535910> An overview of the theory and practice of direct action be found in the 'J.2 What is direct action?' section of this book: <https://www.anarchistfaq.org/afaq/sectionJ.html#secj2>

- 22 For videos, articles, book chapters and books on revolutionary practice in relation to union organising specifically and strategy more broadly, see the resources contained in footnotes xxxiv, xlv, xlvii, xlviii and lv of my review of *The Workers Way to Freedom and Other Council Communist Writings*: <https://buttondown.com/Fightback/archive/a-telescope-to-a-communist-future-review-of-anton>
- 23 In contrast, over in so-called Australia, there is a growing number of anarchist political organisations such as the Melbourne Anarchist Communist Group: <https://melbaecg.au/>, Geelong Anarchist Communists: <https://geelonganarchists.org/>, Anarchist Communists Meanjin: <https://www.acmeanjin.org/>, and ARC Up Anarchist Communists: <https://arcup.org/>, as well as the anarchist union the Anarcho-Syndicalist Federation: <https://asf-iwa.org.au/>. For more on the relationship between anarchism and trade unionism, see chapters 8 and 9 of this book: <https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/zoe-baker-means-and-ends#toc39>
- 24 An overview of anarchist organisational dualism and its historical development can be found in 'Chapter 10: Organizational Dualism: From Bakunin to the Platform' of this book: <https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/zoe-baker-means-and-ends#toc47>
- 25 An overview of platformism and synthesism and their historical development can be found in the 'Platformism and Synthesism' section of chapter 10 in this book: <https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/zoe-baker-means-and-ends#toc50>, while this book compiles debates between early 20th century anarchists regarding synthesism, platformism and other issues within organisational dualism: <https://libcom.org/article/constructive-anarchism-debate-platform-gp-maximov>. In addition, further information regarding especificismo and its historical development can be found in this book: <https://www.akpress.org/anarchist-popular-power.html>, which is based on this PhD: <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/88j5w64y>. Other introductory articles and manifestos about especificismo include: <https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/carl-eugene-stroud-how-do-you-say-especificismo-in-english>, <https://especificismostudies.org/2023/02/17/the-january-document-from-militant-kindergarten/>, <https://www.redblacknotes.com/2022/07/30/foundational-concepts-of-the-specific-anarchist-organisation/> and <https://socialismolibertario.net/2024/09/04/our-principles-and-general-strategy/>
- 26 The failure of socialists in Aotearoa today to transcend the sect-form is discussed in this article: <https://notessouthfromnowhere.wordpress.com/2022/12/01/supplementary-notes-on-sectology-the-current-state-and-political-composition-of-the-socialist-left/>
- 27 Part of this process should be learning from the successes and mistakes of veteran organisers as well as reflecting on the lessons and advice that they have to offer. This book collects some of these: <https://www.interruptingcriminalization.com/resources-all/let-this-radicalize-you-organizing-and-the-revolution-of-reciprocal-care>. I wish this book had been published when I began organising so that I could have learned the lessons and heeded the advice that this book contains back then instead of learning much of it the hard way in the course of over a decade of organising.
- 28 A non-exhaustive list of other important issues that socialists in Aotearoa have that need to be addressed include: the dominant position of white cisgendered heterosexual able-bodied middle-class men within many socialist groups and the composition of such groups not reflecting the entirety of the working-class in Aotearoa (which is critiqued in this article: <http://www.freedomshopaotearoa.nz/2023/09/class-war-in-21st-century-new-zealand.html?m=1>); the continued reproduction of classist, racist, cisheterosexist, ableist and ageist social relations, ideology and culture within many socialist groups; socialists mainly being based in Aotearoa's largest cities and having a minimal presence in smaller towns as well as in rural areas; the geopolitically reformist theory and practice that many socialists have in regards to international matters, which has led to the rise of a campism that supports one bloc of capitalist states against another (which is critiqued in this article: https://newpol.org/issue_post/internationalism-anti-imperialism-and-the-origins-of-campism/ and by the group [People Not States](https://peoplenotstates.wordpress.com/): <https://peoplenotstates.wordpress.com/>) instead of supporting and organising on the basis of a revolutionary, anti-imperialist, intersectional and working-class socialist internationalism; the high levels of burnout and turnover of socialist activists and organisers; the formation of cults of personality around some socialist activists and organisers; a lack of developed formal processes and organisational norms in many socialist groups that can effectively distinguish between and respond to political disagreements, interpersonal conflicts, social harm and all forms of abuse; a lack of historical memory about socialism in Aotearoa (which this archive seeks to help address: <https://nearnsfn.wordpress.com/about-this-project/>) as well as minimal knowledge transfer and dialogue between different generations of socialists.

Secular Buddhist Network

MIKE SLOTT

Five core tasks for mindful political activists

In his book *Mindful Solidarity* (Wellington: Tuwhiri, 2024), Mike Slott offers a perspective which integrates the essential insights of the historical Buddha, Gotama, with radical political theory and activism. For those who are committed to this perspective, he proposes five core—or essential—tasks for creating a life that is meaningful and good, not just for oneself but for all.

Rather than provide answers to the question of the types of strategies socialists need in the short, medium, and long-term, these tasks provide socialists with a philosophical and ethical framework for our activism. They highlight our limits and vulnerabilities as human beings, as well as our capacities for mindfulness and compassion, which are crucial for building transformative movements.

#1 Recognize, accept and embrace our finite life in all its complexity

Our initial task is to face our multilayered experience just as it is, including its tragic dimension. We all experience the 10,000 joys and 10,000 sorrows of a human life.

While we have some ability to shape the course of our life to reduce suffering and experience more joy and happiness, much of what we experience is beyond our control. A life without any suffering at all would not be a truly meaningful human life.

#2 Understand the three basic causes of suffering

- The inevitable pains and losses connected with our finite life and our relative lack of control over the processes of sickness, ageing, death, loss, not getting what we want, and getting what we don't want.
- Our biologically-evolved tendency to cling to or relate to what we experience in a reactive way, based on wanting something (greed), or wanting to avoid something (aversion, hatred), as well as our fundamental tendency to view ourselves and the world from the deluded perspective of the isolated, egoistical self.
- The social systems of exploitation and oppression (capitalism, racism, sexism, homophobia, ageism, disrespect of persons with disabilities, and so on) mutually interact with and reinforce our tendencies to crave and to cling and have a delusory understanding of the self. In addition, these structures of exploitation and oppression directly harm.

#3 Use our capacities for wisdom, mindfulness and compassion to reduce suffering and promote human flourishing

Awareness of the three sources of suffering equips us to discern the situations in which we can make positive changes in our lives while staying within

the limits of our agency. In this third task we use our mindfulness, compassion and wisdom to inform our actions, and the words directed at reducing suffering and promoting flourishing for all. In short, it is to act and speak ethically.

#4 Engage in a lifelong path of transformation based on skilful virtues, wisdom, meditative practices, an ethical life and political activism

This core life task comes close to the Buddhist eightfold path in promoting the need to cultivate a range of capacities that underpin a meaningful and ethical life. These capacities encompass cognition, affective states and bodily sensations; intentions and actions; and personal and communal practices.

But while this life task includes certain elements of the eightfold path, the range of capacities is expanded to include an understanding of critical social theories and what it means to be politically active.

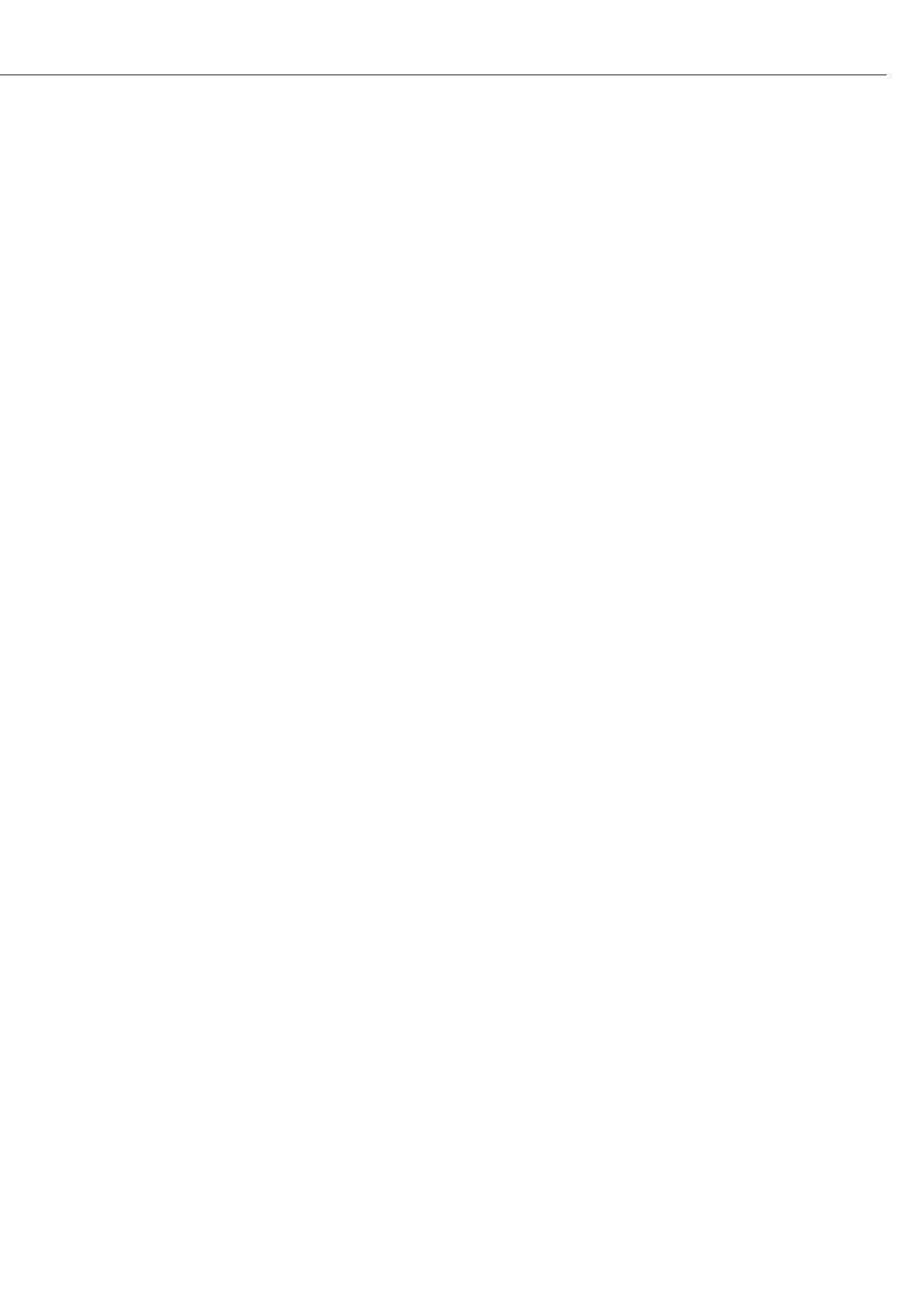
#5 Make transformative changes at both individual and societal levels

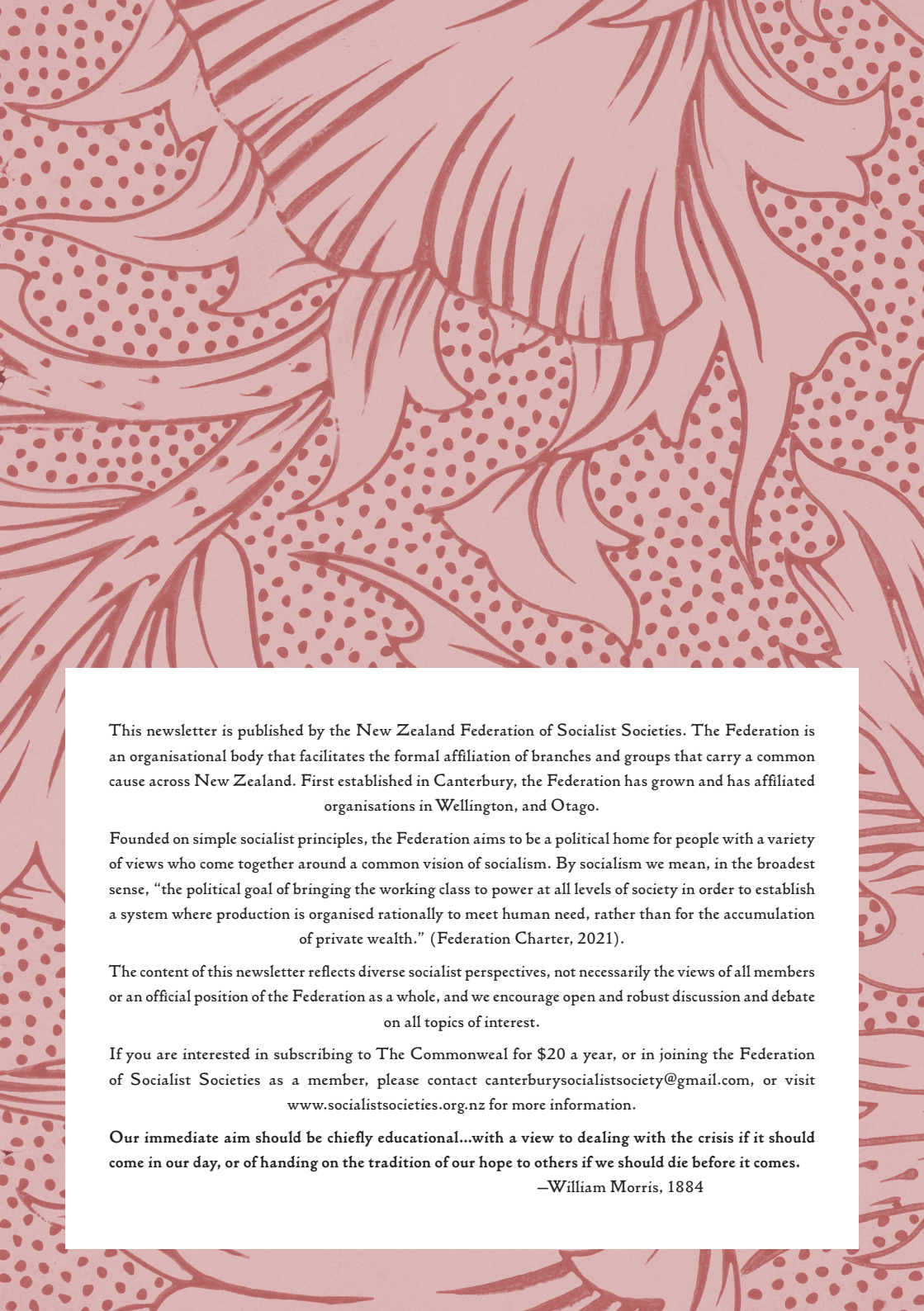
We need to integrate transformative changes at both individual and social levels that reduce

suffering and promote flourishing. The Four Noble Truths of traditional Buddhism do not make the connection between the individual and society because the cause of and remedy for suffering is primarily located within the individual. Recognizing that individual and social transformation are linked is essential. To the extent that we can transform ourselves through meditative practices, for example, we become more effective in our political practice. At the same time, our political activism should aim at both social transformation and individual transformation.

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Mike Slott is a lifelong US political and labor movement activist. A Buddhist practitioner since 2010, he is the editor of the *Secular Buddhist Network* website, responsible for their newsletter, *Rethinking the Dharma/ Reimagining Community*.





This newsletter is published by the New Zealand Federation of Socialist Societies. The Federation is an organisational body that facilitates the formal affiliation of branches and groups that carry a common cause across New Zealand. First established in Canterbury, the Federation has grown and has affiliated organisations in Wellington, and Otago.

Founded on simple socialist principles, the Federation aims to be a political home for people with a variety of views who come together around a common vision of socialism. By socialism we mean, in the broadest sense, “the political goal of bringing the working class to power at all levels of society in order to establish a system where production is organised rationally to meet human need, rather than for the accumulation of private wealth.” (Federation Charter, 2021).

The content of this newsletter reflects diverse socialist perspectives, not necessarily the views of all members or an official position of the Federation as a whole, and we encourage open and robust discussion and debate on all topics of interest.

If you are interested in subscribing to The Commonwealth for \$20 a year, or in joining the Federation of Socialist Societies as a member, please contact canterburysocialistsociety@gmail.com, or visit www.socialistsocieties.org.nz for more information.

Our immediate aim should be chiefly educational...with a view to dealing with the crisis if it should come in our day, or of handing on the tradition of our hope to others if we should die before it comes.

—William Morris, 1884